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Outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out by the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau

In-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters

Outcome of the in-depth review

Addendum

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This note provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters, carried out by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in October 2014.

The in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2015/9), prepared by Mexico, summarizes international statistical activities related to measuring extreme events and disasters, identifies issues and challenges, and makes recommendations on possible follow-up actions in the area.

The outcome of the in-depth review is submitted to the Conference for endorsement.

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I. Introduction

1. Each year, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. These reviews focus on strategic issues and highlight concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.

II. In-depth review discussion and decisions by the Bureau

2. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters in October 2014 based on the paper by Mexico (provided as document ECE/CES/2015/9).

3. The following points were raised in the discussion at the CES Bureau meeting:

(a) National statistical offices possess data that can be used for disaster relief, preparedness and risk reduction. When extreme events and disasters occur, there is an urgent demand for real-time data on population, businesses and infrastructure in the concerned area. Historical data are needed for risk-management, early warning systems and assessing the impact of disasters;

(b) Clarification of the role of national statistical offices in providing information on disasters and extreme events is important. One example of the issues to be considered is how to deal with statistical confidentiality when detailed information is needed for disaster relief;

(c) Statistical information has to be combined with geographical information. Institutional cooperation between the national statistical offices and mapping agencies is needed for this purpose;

(d) There are strong similarities between the work on this topic and the work on climate change related statistics: first, it is important to define the role of official statistics in this area, then look at what official statistics can contribute, what users need, which statistics are readily available and which should be developed in future. It is crucial to establish collaboration with partner organizations involved in this area;

(e) One of the first tasks would be to agree on common classifications and definitions of disasters and extreme events for statistical purposes. The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) was mentioned as an important reference document, providing a typology of disasters;

(f) Several United Nations agencies are dealing with this topic and better coordination is needed;

(g) The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has initiated a programme for the development of natural disaster statistics in Asia and the Pacific. A meeting of the expert group on this topic took place on 27-29 October 2014 in Sendai, Japan;

(h) The 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held on 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan. One of the sessions was on data gaps. Participation of statisticians to help clarify concepts and terminology will be important.

4. The Bureau asked the Secretariat, in consultation with Mexico, Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) to develop terms of reference for a group to deal with statistics on extreme events and disasters, and explore countries' interest in participating in the work. The group should consider the role of official statistics in this area and develop a work plan.

5. UNISDR made a recommendation to countries to involve national statistical offices in the national delegations who will participate in the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan in 2015.

6. As a follow-up, the CES Bureau discussed the draft terms of reference for a Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters in February 2015. The following issues were raised in the discussion:

(a) Measuring extreme events and disasters is closely linked with geospatial data. The work should be coordinated with the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) and related initiatives.

(b) The Task Force needs to coordinate its work closely with the work of UNESCAP in this area, and with the CES Steering Group on Climate Change-Related Statistics. A special session on measuring extreme events and disasters is planned to be held during the expert meeting on climate change related statistics on 2-3 September 2015 in Geneva.

(c) The UN Committee on Environmental-economic Accounting (UNCEEA) should be kept informed about the work due to the close relation between SEEA and measuring extreme events and disasters.

(d) Mexico, Turkey, OECD and Eurostat expressed their interest to participate in the Task Force.

7. In February 2015, the Bureau approved the terms of reference for the Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters (see Annex I). The Bureau asked the Secretariat to contact other CES members to explore their interest to participate in the Task Force.

III. Proposal for the Conference

8. The Conference of European Statisticians is invited to endorse the outcome of the in-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters, and take note of the in-depth review paper by Mexico (ECE/CES/2015/9).

Annex I

Terms of Reference of a Task Force on Measuring extreme Events and Disasters

I. Background

9. There is increased policy interest in measuring extreme events and disasters. Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include issues of disaster preparedness and risk reduction (in particular Goals 11 on cities and human settlements, and Goal 13 on climate change). A number of indicators on related targets are proposed (such as losses from extreme events and disasters, people and businesses affected, etc.). Furthermore, the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held on 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan. A proposal on targets and indicators on disaster risk reduction was developed for this Conference. The area is also related to climate change and its impacts.

10. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) conducted an in-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters in October 2014, based on a paper by Mexico and notes by UNECE and Turkey. A representative of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Ms. Margaret Wahlström (Head of UNISDR) participated in the discussion.

11. The main conclusions of the in-depth review are:

(a) It is important to clarify the role of NSOs in providing information on disasters and extreme events, including issues such as institutional cooperation, integration of statistical and geographical information, statistical confidentiality, etc.;

(b) One of the first tasks would be to agree on common classifications and definitions on disasters and extreme events for statistical purposes. There are currently several classifications used by countries and international organisations. The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) was mentioned as an important reference document;

(c) There are strong similarities between the work on this topic and the work on climate change related statistics: defining the role of official statistics in the area, analyzing what official statistics can contribute, what users need, which statistics are readily available and which should be developed in future. It is crucial to establish collaboration with partner organizations involved in this area.

12. The in-depth review paper by Mexico (ECE/CES/BUR/2014/OCT/3) included a comprehensive overview of the related international activities. While there are many activities going on, these do not focus on statistics. Several international organizations deal with disaster risk reduction and disaster relief. They are users of data which often come from research institutions, insurance companies, news agencies, etc., and are not consistent with the definitions and methods used in official statistics. Official statistics are involved in providing data on extreme events and disasters in a very few countries. At the same time, the statistical systems have at their disposal data on population, businesses and environment that could be much better utilised for disaster preparedness and relief.

13. The only international activity that has a strong focus on data and statistics is the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (under UN-ESCAP, launched in October 2014). The members of the Expert Group are government-nominated technical advisors and regional and international experts from statistics and disaster

management. The main output of this Expert Group is planned to be a basic list of disaster-related development indicators. The Expert Group plans to develop also a framework comprising classification, definitions and standards for the basic range of disaster-related statistics, and guidelines for production and dissemination of these statistics. The work should be completed within two years.

14. As a follow-up to the in-depth review, the Bureau asked the Secretariat, in consultation with Mexico, Eurostat, OECD and UNISDR, to develop terms of reference for a group to deal with statistics on extreme events and disasters, and explore countries' interest in participating in the work. The group should consider the role of official statistics in this area and develop a work plan. The work should take into account the existing international initiatives to avoid duplication, including the UNESCAP initiative. The Task Force may benefit from the successful experience of the CES Task Force which prepared the *Recommendations on climate change related statistics*, endorsed in 2014 by approximately 60 countries and a number of international organizations.

II. Mandate

15. The work of the Task Force is conducted within the framework of CES and its Bureau. The Task Force will be created for a period of two years, after which it will submit a final report with concrete recommendations. The work of the Task Force will be coordinated with the Steering Group on climate change-related statistics.

III. Objectives

16. The main objective of the Task Force is to clarify the role of official statistics in providing data related to extreme events and disasters, and identify practical steps how national statistical offices in coordination with national agencies responsible for disaster management can support disaster management and risk reduction.

17. The work should take into account the relevant issues raised in the context of SDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda.

18. In pursuing these objectives, the Task Force should cooperate with the UN agencies and other international organisations working in this area.

IV. Planned activities and outputs

19. The Task Force will undertake the following activities:

(a) Clarify the role of National Statistical Offices in measuring extreme events and disasters and providing information for disaster risk reduction;

(b) Analyse the main data needs related to extreme events and disasters of the various stakeholders, including the outcomes of the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan (14-18 March 2015);

(c) Review the currently available official statistics and practices adopted by countries and international organisations in statistics on extreme events and disasters (possibly by a survey). The review will include an analysis of:

i. the role of NSOs,
ii. institutional cooperation,
iii. main challenges,
iv. main data sources (including administrative sources),

v. data sharing (including issues related to statistical confidentiality),
vi. integration of statistical and geographical data,
vii. existing "key" statistics about extreme events and disasters;

(d) Map existing official statistics (national, regional and global level) with data needs and identify gaps;

(e) Identify needs for harmonisation of classifications, terms and definitions;

(f) Identify and consider recent and upcoming developments that have implications for the statistics on extreme events and disasters, such as Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), SEEA and Ecosystem Accounting;

(g) Draft recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters within the realm of official statistics.

20. The main output of the work of the Task Force will be *Recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters,* including:

(a) Clarification of the role of NSOs and statistical systems;

(b) Statistical and geographical data needs of stakeholders related to prevention, care and measuring impact;

(c) A glossary of most relevant terms and definitions;

(d) A draft typology of extreme events and disasters which at a later stage can be further developed towards a flexible and adaptable international classification on disasters;

(e) List of disaster related statistics and indicators to be produced by NSOs as part of official statistics;

(f) Case examples from NSOs and international organisations.

V. Timetable

21. The task force is foreseen to work for two years. A detailed work plan (including milestones and interim deliverables) will be drafted in the first two months after setting up of the Task Force. The work is planned to finish with the approval of the *Recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters* by the CES in June 2017.

VI. Methods of work

22. The Task Force will work primarily by e-mail, wiki workspace and telephone conferences. Physical meetings of the Task Force could be organised back-to-back to other meetings that would be attended by a significant number of task force members, such as the expert meeting on climate change related statistics.

VII. Membership

23. So far Mexico, Turkey, Eurostat and OECD have expressed their interest in the activities related to statistics on extreme events and disasters. Other countries and international organizations are welcome to participate in the work.

24. UNECE will act as the secretariat of the task force.